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ABSTRACT

The psychological profiles of leaving and persisting students at a small rural community college in Utah were investigated. Subjects were 316 freshmen students, 41.1% of the Fall 1976 class, who were administered the Bipolar Psychological Inventory. Profiles of students leaving the college during the following year were compared to the profiles of students who persisted for the year. No significant differences were found between male leavers and male persisters; however, there were differences between female leavers and female persisters. Female leavers were less achieving, experienced less family harmony, and had more personal problems than did persisting students. (Author)

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A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE OF COLLEGE DROPOUTS

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A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILE OF COLLEGE DROPOUTS

The attrition problem at colleges and universities has become acute. The Carnegie Commission estimated the national college attrition rate at 60 percent. Other studies now show that the dropout rate as measured by students graduating in four years from the original college has been 40 percent nationally for the last 45 years (Cope and Hannah, 1975)

The problem has been intense enough that some schools have modified grading practices to accommodate the phenomenon. For example, Metropolitan Community College, a four-campus system in Kansas City, Missouri, has initiated a new grade "V" which simply means that the student has vanished rather than withdrawn. This practice was initiated at Metropolitan when it was discovered that 30 percent of all grades given were "W's" and the need was felt to distinguish between a student who legitimately withdraws and one who just vanishes.

It may not be an overstatement to say that every educational institution has at one time or another studied its dropouts. Since 1966, there have been 2,575 studies reported in documents or journals and abstracted in ERIC that use the word "dropout" as a major descriptor. Most of these documents are unpublished. A review of dissertations dealing specifically with college attrition since 1970 (Noel, 1975) shows 65 entries. For all this research, none have looked at the psychological profile of the leavers.

Method

The problem addressed in this research was to compare the psychological profile of leaving and persisting students at Snow College, a rural community college in central Utah. The instrument used was the Bipolar Psychological Inventory (Roe, Howell, Payne 1972).

The Bipolar Psychological Inventory was designed for use with both normal and clinical populations. It provides a fairly comprehensive personality assessment that has special utility in an institution like Snow College. The "bipolar" nature of the test gives special emphasis to both the positive and the negative aspects of personality. The constructive potentials, as well as the pathological areas of functioning, are important if something beyond diagnosis is desired.

The Bipolar Psychological Inventory was administered to 316 freshmen in English classes Fall Quarter 1976 to establish school norms. This sample was 41.1 percent of the freshman class. The profiles of students leaving Snow during the following year were compared to the profile of students who persisted for the year (Tables 1 and 3). Statistical comparisons are on Tables 2 and 4. The data represents 96 persisting males and 141 persisting females. There were 42 male leavers with profiles and 37 female leavers with profiles. This means that profiles were available for 31.5 percent of the total leavers and 45.8 percent of the total persisters. Leavers and persisters were compared statistically on each sub-test using a t-test.

Results

On the Bipolar Psychological Inventory, differences between male students persisting at Snow College and male students leaving Snow College prior to graduation were not statistically significant at the 0.05 level of confidence. The largest difference was on the Achieving - Unmotivated scale.

Insert Table 1 and Table 2 here

There were some statistically significant differences between leaving females and persisting females. The significant differences occurred on the Achieving - Unmotivated scale, the Family Harmony - Family Discord scale, and the Problem Index scale. The differences were that leaving females were less motivated, had less family harmony, and more personal problems than did persisting females.

Insert Table 3 and Table 4 here

The difference on the Unmotivated - Achieving scale would indicate that females leaving Snow College prior to graduation were significantly less motivated than females who persist. Students who score high on this scale are typically unmotivated, underachieving, lazy, procrastinating, unassuming, perhaps slothful, and irresponsible according to the authors of the test.

The difference on the Family Discord - Family Harmony scale would indicate that female students leaving Snow College prior to graduation have significantly more family discord than the persisting students. High

scores on this scale generally indicate family discord, hatred, mutual rejection, dissension and interpersonal conflict according to the test authors.

The differences between leaving and persisting females on the Problem Index cannot be defined specifically unless the test items are referred to for each particular student. Since it is an index which indicated possible severe problems with multiple symptoms, only an item analysis for each individual can be meaningful. It is essentially a clinical scale. Typically, however, a high score on this scale not only indicated multiple problems, but intense dissatisfaction.

The data could suggest that this college environment is not as supportive for the woman student with problems as for the man student. Perhaps men with problems persist because the environment is supportive. Perhaps women with problems leave because of lack of support. This point has implications for the total college culture across the United States although this study is quite narrow and specific.

References

Cope, Robert G., William Hannah, Revolving College Doors, The Causes and Consequences of Dropping Out, and Transferring. New York: 1975.

Noel, Lee College Student Retention. Paper presented a National Retention Seminar, Salt Lake, 1976.

Roe, Allan V., Howell, Robert J., and Payne, I. Reed, Bipolar Psychological Inventory. Orem: 1972.

Table 1

Bipolar Psychological Inventory
Male Leavers and Persisters
Snow College 1977

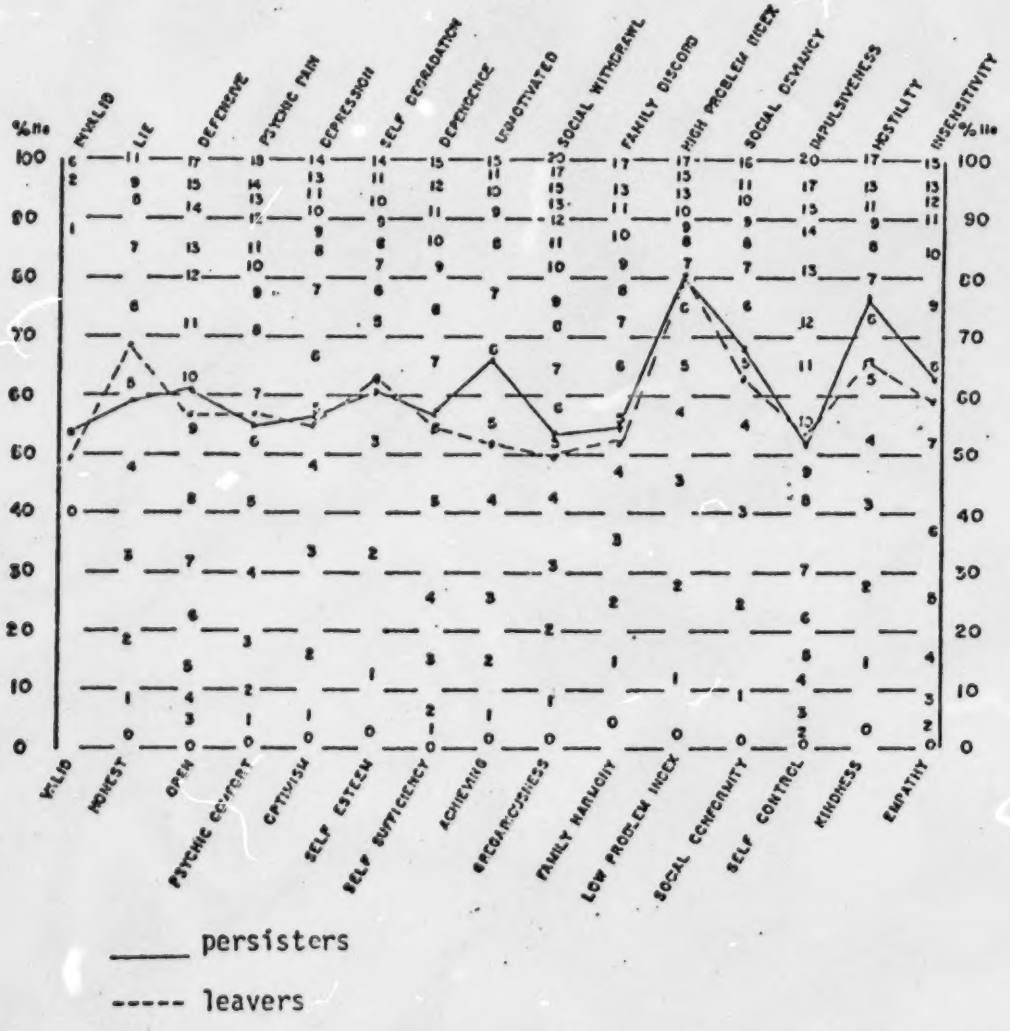


Table 2

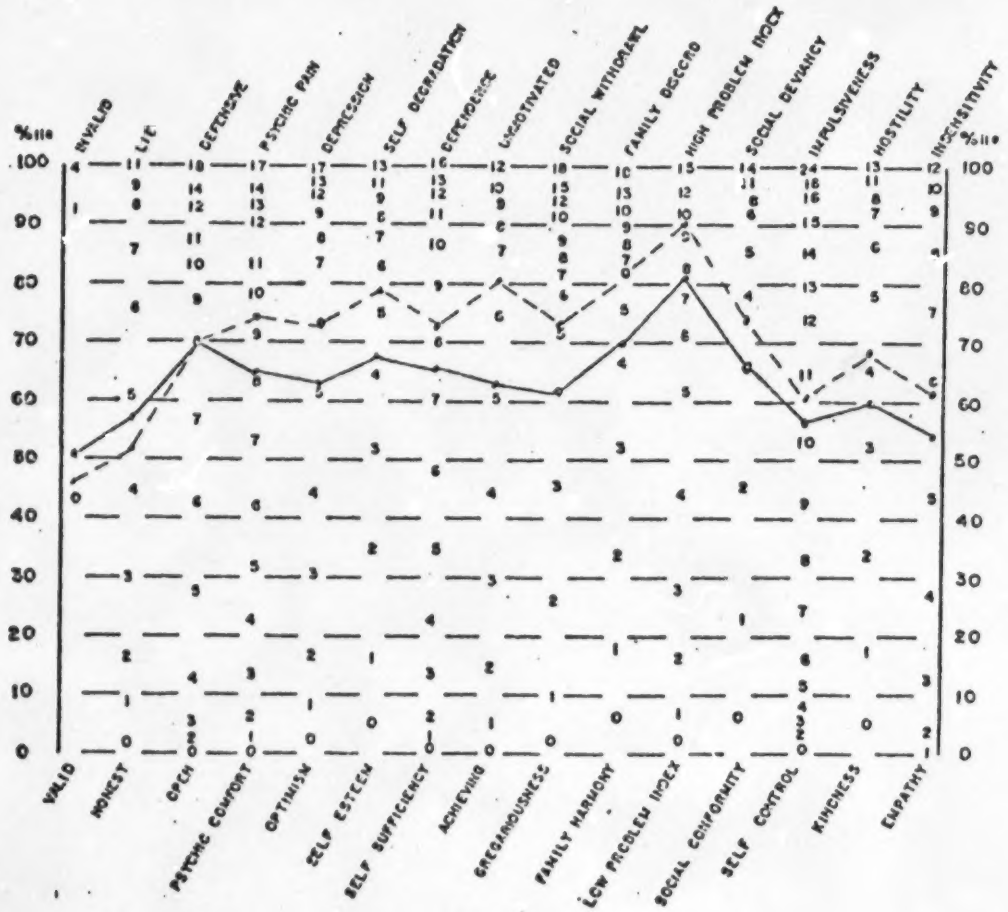
Bipolar Psychological Inventory Comparisons of
Leaving Students and Persisting Students
1977 Males

Sub test	Persisting Students n=96 M	SD	Leaving Students n=42 M	SD	Difference	t*
Valid	0.417	1.092	0.310	0.715	0.107	0.582
Honest	4.844	2.498	5.452	2.549	0.608	-1.307
Open	9.833	3.272	9.333	3.221	0.500	0.830
Psychic Comfort	6.271	3.252	6.548	3.989	0.277	-0.429
Optimism	4.906	4.757	4.810	3.624	0.096	0.117
Self Esteem	3.823	4.793	4.048	3.575	0.225	-0.273
Self Sufficiency	6.208	3.071	6.000	2.955	0.208	0.370
Achieving	5.938	9.180	4.738	2.651	1.200	0.831
Gregariousness	5.229	3.774	4.762	3.811	0.467	0.667
Family Harmony	4.927	4.227	4.452	3.833	0.475	0.627
Problem Index	6.854	6.673	6.595	4.306	0.259	0.231
Social Conformity	5.188	3.660	4.822	2.845	0.335	0.559
Self Control	9.496	5.786	9.810	4.232	0.314	-0.316
Kindness	6.417	8.326	5.286	3.665	1.131	0.844
Empathy	7.844	3.003	7.619	2.819	0.225	0.412

*no statistically significant differences at .05 level of confidence

Table 3

Bipolar Psychological Inventory
Female Leavers and Persisters
Snow College 1977



_____ persisters

----- leavers

Table 4

Bipolar Psychological Inventory Comparisons of
Leaving Students and Persisting Students
1977 Females

Sub test	Persisting Students n=141 M	SD	Leaving Students n=37 M	SD	Difference	t*
Valid	0.348	0.910	0.108	0.393	0.240	1.564
Honest	4.837	2.554	4.541	2.556	0.296	0.627
Open	8.028	3.052	7.973	3.148	0.055	0.969
Psychic Comfort	8.057	3.940	9.351	4.111	1.294	-1.762
Optimism	5.106	2.885	6.027	4.413	0.921	-1.531
Self Esteem	4.291	3.268	5.432	4.337	1.141	-1.758
Self Sufficiency	7.482	3.305	8.216	3.917	0.734	-1.155
Achieving	5.234	2.653	6.514	2.883	1.307	-2.565*
Gregariousness	4.014	3.433	5.108	2.932	1.094	-1.775
Family Harmony	4.326	3.887	6.243	5.118	1.917	-2.490*
Problem Index	7.730	3.810	9.486	4.426	1.756	-2.410*
Social Conformity	2.950	2.456	3.595	2.500	0.645	-1.416
Self Control	10.284	3.731	10.622	4.361	0.338	-0.473
Kindness	3.582	2.508	4.324	2.729	0.742	-1.572
Empathy	5.532	3.902	5.865	2.136	0.333	-0.499

*statistically significant at .05 level of confidence